

ROSEMARY, LADY JOHNSON-FERGUSON

REQUIEM EULOGY - 3 FEBRUARY 2021

Thank you all for coming to celebrate my mother's life, to pray for and remember her and to share in this celebration. It is unfortunate that only a few of us are allowed to be here today and I thank Fr Simon, Marcus Reeves at the organ, Rachel and the team at Farleigh for arranging this Requiem. My mother attended Mass here for much of the last 20 years.

In amongst the loss of a relative there are often lighter moments as we discover and share old memories. Paul, Simon and I have rediscovered many photographs and have had many laughs; many of them are on the website that Paul has created. Amongst the letters is a short history she wrote for the local WI in 2018 and I will use some of her text.

Mum was born in London in 1942 and was adopted by the Whitehead family living in Surrey. They soon moved to Kent where she spent a very happy childhood. She went to the Sacred Heart Convent at Woldingham. Catholicism had deep roots in the family and from her parents and the nuns at Woldingham she acquired a strong cradle faith, which endured. She "enjoyed all sports and the domestic science lessons at school but the rest left me cold." School holidays were spent riding often competing in Gymkhanas, playing Tennis or swimming with friends.

Her father Cecil's work was in Marble so this often took them to Italy, where his cousins ran the Italian side of the business; holidays were often spent with Swiss friends in the Alps and skiing became a passion. She left school at 17 and spent a year at a finishing school in Lausanne ostensibly to learn French, but also became an accomplished cook, and then a few months in Florence with the Marquessa learning Italian and about art. She was still in touch with friends from both late last year.

She spent most of the next two winters working with Ski Club of Great Britain in the Alps leading groups, or off ski racing. "What fun we all had in those crazy days!" In between she worked for her father's company in London and shared a flat with a group of school friends enjoying a fun time - two of them became godmothers - and they remained good friends.

She met my father in Paris at supper en-route to the Ampleforth Lourdes Pilgrimage that she had gate-crashed at the last minute, or in fact she met his mother first as both were

wearing Sacred Heart medals and not being shy she introduced herself to her future mother-in-law. They were married on a glamorous day in Chelsea in 1964 and set up home in Croydon. We 3 boys appeared in rapid succession and soon we moved to what they thought could be their forever home in the Thicket near Maidenhead.

When my father was offered the opportunity to relocate to Paris they jumped at the chance. With three boys in a flat not far from Champs Elysee. Summers and weekends were necessarily spent out of Paris camping, climbing and at the beach. Returning to the UK they settled near my mother's parents on the Kent/Surrey border. With 3 boys at Ampleforth, she had more time: She started with the WI and re-engaged with the WRVS cooking at home and then delivering Meals on Wheels. She lamented changes in " 'ealth and Safety" rules (not for the last time) which prevented her and her friends cooking good meals themselves and was often furious about the standard of the massed produced versions that they then took round.

When IBM moved my father's job to Basingstoke, they found a home in Upper Clatford.

In the winters my parents had returned to skiing. Ski Club Over 50s allowed my father to share Mum's passion; on one such trip in 1989 my father had a serious fall on a very steep icy slope. For my mother, life changed overnight as she first fought the medics to do more and then supported my father through his long recuperation. She was just 46; for the next 27 years his care became the centre of her life. Helping him relearn language and basic skills, establishing and maintaining a routine, planning and organising their lives was the new norm. Where he had largely run the household finances, she was suddenly in the driving seat. At times it was draining, sometimes frustrating and not what they had planned for his early retirement from IBM to the house they had just bought in Scotland.

Skiing continued providing her an annual break from caring and took her back into the mountains. Initially with the same O50s group who she had been with in 89, then turning to more adventurous heli-skiing in Canada, USA and ski-touring in the Alps. In 97 she was very proud to complete the renowned Haute Route, an arduous 7 day high altitude trek from Chamonix and Zermatt between remote mountain refuges. Subsequent trips became less challenging, but were nonetheless a highlight of her year. As one of her relatives wrote to us: "she lit up when talking of the mountains"

She was well known to the local orthopaedic surgeons after a number of skiing accidents in the Alps. But despite broken pelvis, ribs and arms she was still skiing into her mid-70s.

One regret was that we boys all settled with our families away from Andover in Paris, Devon or wherever the Army has sent me. She loved being a grandmother and was keen to help and to offer advice, some times more welcome than at others, but always well intentioned. She was the formal and firm Granny where manners were a given and our girls quickly learnt for example that they ate what was given. But they also knew and loved the cheeky sense of humour that was underneath. She was generous, really interested, loving and full of praise. As they got older trips to the theatre, local country houses and pub lunches were very popular and allowed them to get to know her.

They were proud of a modern Granny, engaged with emails, mobile phones and the internet, but woe betide them if they tried to update or change how she had managed to make that IT work. There is only so much tech a 75 year old granny can absorb from a teenager!

With Ian she set up a scottish country dancing group in Upper Clatford that she ran through the 80s and 90s with much success, hilarity and at times not a little frustration. The Amesbury dancing groups kept her own dancing going. She loved the company, the fun and the excitement of dance.

She was always active and a great enthusiast living to the mantra that you get out what you put in. The Abbots Ann village shop was one such enthusiasm. She really enjoyed her early mornings sorting papers and baking the croissants. She was very grateful for the way that the shop and village responded during the Lockdown to support the over 75s.

She was involved in the Conservative Women's Organisation first with canvassing and getting the vote out, then with fundraising and was latterly President of the constituency branch providing local advice to political activists as well as hosting fund raising activities over the years. She was a long term WI member in Goodworth Clatford, member of NADFAS and latterly took up bridge as both a social and competitive hobby. The house is full of bridge training gadgets and books; if she was going to play she was going to do so to the best of her abilities; her never too old to learn attitude is perhaps a lesson to us all. In

recent years her bridge lunches and afternoons were a key part of the winter diary, and finding Bridge and Skiing holidays was hitting the jackpot.

Golf though and particularly the Tidworth Golf Club has been central for well over 30 years. She relished the competition and the focus needed to improve and sustain her game, the camaraderie and the social life but above all made and kept a wonderful group of friends there who remained many of her closest. Early on she took an active role in team competitions progressing to be Ladies Captain in 92-93, and then stepped into management of the Club becoming one of the first Chairmen. Her fellow committee members and club officials learned never to underestimate her determination on behalf of the Club and its members. I know from the many letters we have received that she will be missed and it was hugely important to her. Her wishes are that her ashes be distributed at the Club, which should be possible after lockdown.

She had various foot and hand operations as both were interfering with golf, skiing and dancing. The last op just a year ago was finally allowing her to grip a golf club properly again, so she was thoroughly fed up and frustrated that her developing illness prevented her playing over the summer. She was slow to accept that she was aging and tried hard to keep active and busy even to the end - hers was "a life well lived". It took some persuasion to make her even consider being driven to Devon for Christmas, when she clearly wasn't well enough: she wanted her independence there and moreover didn't want to be a burden.

It is very strange to be at such a signal family gathering without Mum; she loved a party, was a great organiser and wonderful host; she would have been the life and soul of the day, mixing, directing and pulling people together; I am sure will be watching us from above. I do hope that some of her friends and the wider family who have not been able to be with us in the Chapel today are with us through the live stream or are able to watch later. We thank Fr Simon and the team here for making this possible.

Her passing is a shock to us all and she leaves a huge hole in our family and in the lives of the many other people that she touched on a daily, weekly or less regular basis. We can be comforted knowing that she was at peace in the Hospice and that her faith remained undiminished and strong. We will all miss her good humour, her wisdom, her interest in us all and her kindness.

She succumbed very quickly to the sickness in the end and would have hated being a patient and feeling that she was a burden. May she smile and giggle in heaven.